



BENIN

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
Population, Health, and Nutrition Briefing Sheet

Country Profile

The Republic of Benin is prominent in West Africa due to its remarkable transition to a democratic, free-market society in the 1990s; however, although the economy is improving, Benin remains one of Africa's poorest countries. Nearly 70 percent of the country lives on the 12 percent of the land closest to the Atlantic Ocean. Only half of the population has easy access to general health care services and only one-fifth actually use the health services.

USAID Strategy

USAID/Benin has introduced new strategies and refined existing ones to maximize program effectiveness in the health and education sectors. While building on national-level success in policy development and social marketing, the USAID mission's new integrated program has a geographic focus in Borgou, the northernmost region of Benin. The program emphasizes decentralization to achieve results, seeking to strengthen the role of local communities and civil society in the management and financing of health centers and schools as an integral part of its health and education objectives. By assisting the Government of Benin (GOB) to devolve effective power to the local level and enhancing the advocacy, management, and decision-making skills of local public and private entities, the mission's program will increase GOB's absorptive capacity and efficiency. By encouraging local participation, the program will expand sustainable health and education services delivery.

restrictive policies and laws and help build a sustainable network of integrated, quality family planning services. Ongoing USAID-supported initiatives include social marketing of condoms and oral contraceptives, promotion of community-based distribution of contraceptives, training in commodity logistics and provision of reproductive health services, integration of family planning into medical school curricula, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) capacity-building in program management, and information, education, and communication (IEC). The mission also sees developing primary education as integral to lowering Benin's high fertility rate.

Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted infections (STIs). USAID's condom social marketing program is the major national HIV/AIDS prevention activity. USAID also supports a variety of other IEC-related activities, including training outreach workers to promote HIV/STI sensitivity in the community, capacity-building for women's professional groups active in HIV/STI prevention and control, and development of advocacy tools for improved AIDS policies. The mission also provides support to Benin's National AIDS Control Program to improve management capacity and clarify the program's coordinating role.

Child Survival. USAID/Benin has worked to improve child survival by supporting the social marketing of oral rehydration salts, training village health volunteers, disseminating IEC materials, and additional child survival activities managed by UNICEF/Benin. At the policy level, the mission and its partners are advocating for the nationwide adoption of the integrated management of childhood illnesses (IMCI) approach. A corresponding standard package of child survival services is at the core of the mission's integrated family health program for Borgou Region and will be introduced by Africare in Oueme Region. USAID supports extensive nutritional education, rehabilitation, and income generation activities under a nationwide maternal and child health program implemented by Catholic Relief Services.

Major Program Areas

Promotion of Integrated Family Health. This program supports integrated family health services implemented by private voluntary organizations (PVOs) in a target area in northern Benin, Borgou Region. The program also supports national policy initiatives and social marketing of family planning and health commodities.

Promotion of Family Planning. Since the GOB officially adopted a population policy in 1996, the mission has continued to advocate for and support efforts to reform



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Results

- Social marketing activities implemented by Population Services International (PSI) have been expanded to three northern regions of Benin to increase access to condoms and oral rehydration salts (ORS). During 1997, 463 new sales points were established, over 3 million condoms and 1.75 million ORS packets were distributed, and roughly 1,500 community-based distributors were trained or retrained to distribute these commodities. PSI also conducted 67 AIDS awareness and prevention events, reaching approximately 17,000 people.
- USAID/Benin assisted in the 1997 creation of a Beninese Health NGO Network, *Réseau des ONG Béninoises de Santé* (ROBS), which had 15 members by the end of its first year. USAID and its partners have helped strengthen members' capacity in strategic planning and development of IE&C techniques and materials.
- After a national population policy implementation plan was developed with support from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and USAID/Benin, the mission drafted a national strategy for reproductive health training in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and UNFPA. The first step in this strategy is to revise the reproductive health norms and standards of care.

Success Stories

Given the synergistic nature of USAID/Benin's program, successful achievement of results in one area tends to enhance results in another. One example is an education project that integrates health promotion activities at the primary school level, using school children as change agents for improved health behaviors. Similarly, activities in democracy and governance are expected to reinforce the promotion of local capacity in the health and education sectors in Borgou Region.

Clinic Jordan, an NGO-run clinic in Borgou Region, held 25 separate events in local languages with folkloric artists in different neighborhoods of the regional capital of Parakou to sensitize people to the benefits of birth spacing. These were supported by local language radio broadcasts. As a result of the six-month series of events in 1997, the number of new family

planning acceptors has doubled.

The 1996 demographic and health survey (DHS), funded by USAID with assistance from UNICEF, has been adopted as the official reference document for demographic and health data. DHS findings have been presented at the national level and are now being disseminated to regional decision-makers.

Continuing Challenges

USAID/Benin continues to operate with significant staffing and funding constraints, and is still working to reinforce a cooperative relationship with the GOB to facilitate the provision of USAID technical assistance and continue decentralizing authority to the local level. The mission and its partners are striving to achieve the full integration of reproductive health into training programs and primary health services, sustainable expansion of social marketing initiatives with an increased family health product line, IMCI adoption and implementation by the GOB, and adoption of other model child survival services packages in Borgou Region. Capacity-building in the public and private sectors remains a key area. The mission is focusing systems strengthening activities on commodity logistics and IEC programs.



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